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RECOLLECTIONS OF A PIONEER NURSE

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My plan when entering the New England Hospital Training-School for Nurses, September 1, 1871 (then the only training-school in America), was to complete my course there and as soon as possible after graduating to go to St. Thomas's Hospital—Miss Nightingale's school—in London for a year or two additional training, then to return to America prepared to take charge of a school.

Plans are always so easily made and so much more easily changed. I was very near my graduation when one day a doctor connected with the hospital, and one who had always taken great interest in my plans, Dr. Augusta Pope, came to me to tell me that during her summer vacation in Lenox, Mass., she had met Mrs. Hobson, of New York, one of the directors of the Training-School for nurses connected with Bellevue Hospital and which had been organized but a few months before. The school, which was in charge of Sister Helen, an English nurse, was in need of a superintendent of night duty, and both Dr. Pope and Mrs. Hobson thought it would be wise for me to go there in that capacity for one year, and at the end of that time go to London.

I thought the advice good and accepted it. When my year as night superintendent came to an end I was offered the position of assistant to Sister Helen at Bellevue, and at the same time came the offer of the position of superintendent of the Training-School connected with the Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston.

Again I changed my plans and took the last-named position. The school was small, having only three wards, two male and one female,—in all nearly fifty patients. The rest of the wards, nine or ten in number, were cared for as they always had been, the physicians of the visiting staff thinking and saying that the nursing was done quite as well as it could be or as they wished it done.

Pioneer work is never particularly easy, and I soon found that if the school ever enlarged its borders, it must be because it could show that the work done by it was superior to that done in the old wards and in the old way. There were no trained nurses in the school. It had existed for one year, but I was the first graduate nurse to have charge of it. So it came about quite naturally that when special nursing was to be done I became the special nurse, and this in addition to my legitimate duties as superintendent of the school. Many a time have I done special night duty for three consecutive nights in addition to my own work during the day, and if a nurse fell out from illness it was myself who filled the gap and did her work, that nothing be left undone.

Thanks, first, to my Training-School, where we were made to be very particular in every detail, and, second, to my most valuable experience in Bellevue, where much work as well as the entire care of the wards at night was required of me, I knew my practical work well, and in three months from the time I entered the hospital another ward was added to those we already had.

Thus we continued to grow, until at the end of my first year the entire nursing of the hospital, with the exception of the "private ward," was under the control of the Training-School. A small Nurses' Home had been constructed from an old building on the grounds, and we were recognized as an important part of the hospital. I can never forget the kindness of the superintendent of the hospital, Dr. Norton Folsom, during all those trying months, and I very well knew it was largely through his influence that we grew so fast.

When we were settled in our new home I began thinking again of my long-cherished plan to go to St. Thomas's. I spoke of it to my directors, and they promised to help me all they could. Mr. Martin Brimmer knew personally Mr. Rothborne, Miss Nightingale's cousin, who was president of the Nightingale Training-School managers, and he wrote to him of me. After some months it was decided that I should go as a visitor, not as a pupil, to St. Thomas's, and this with the cordial invitation to make my stay as long as I chose, our managers thinking that I would gain more in this way, and that I did not need the usual drilling of the pupil nurse.

On April 16, 1877, I set sail from New York with a party of friends who were going to Europe for a season of play,—I the happiest of the party, I am quite sure. I reached London on April 30, and with my package of letters of introduction I set forth, first to see Mr. Rothborne. He was not at home, but Mrs. Rothborne advised me to go to Mrs. Wardroper, the matron at St. Thomas's. In due time I was ushered into her presence, and saw a small woman of, I should say, fifty

years sitting behind a desk. She was dressed in black with a fluffy lace cap, the strings of which hung down her back nearly to her waist. Upon her hands she had black kid gloves, and never did I see her in her office without them. She seemed to write as well with them on as the ordinary woman does without gloves. She was grave and dignified in appearance, and asked me at once "just what do you come to us to learn?"

After we had talked a little she said, "I will send you to the home, and Miss Crossland, the home sister, will take care of you and tell you where to go from day to day or from week to week." I was then taken to the "home" and introduced to Miss Crossland, a woman of about thirty-five years of age, with clear blue eyes which looked straight into one's own and a pleasant smile, dark hair combed plainly back from a good forehead. She was a pretty woman with the fresh English complexion.

I was given a very cosy room, and was told that I must feel at home in the office at any time. I arrived before dinner, and at noon-time was taken into the nurses' dining-room to meet them all and also to meet with many surprises. The first was to see two nurses with large pitchers pouring beer into tumblers beside the plates; then to be introduced to some nurses as "Miss," and to others as "Nurse."

After dining, Miss Crossland took me for a walk in Hyde Park and told me many of their customs. Every nurse had an allowance of so much beer a day, and two nurses in turn were assigned to draw and pour it. Each nurse also had her monthly allowance of tea and sugar, and made her own tea at the large open fire in the dining-room, where at mealtime a huge teakettle was always boiling. Each nurse emptied her own teapot at a certain place and washed it and took it to her room. There were a certain number of "lady probationers," women who paid for their instruction for one year, and these nurses were always addressed as "Miss." The nurse probationers were women of a different class, who received a little compensation while training, and were addressed and spoken of as "Nurse." The lady probationers were given charge of wards at the end of the year of probation. The term at St. Thomas's when I was there was four years. The nurses at the end of the probationer year were made staff nurses or put on night duty for a year. The one in charge of a ward was always called ward sister, and was given the name of the ward of which she had charge. The larger number of the wards at St. Thomas's were named for members of the royal family, and so there were "Sister Albert," "Sister Arthur," and so on. The sister of the venereal ward was called "Sister Magdalene," and "Sister Ophthalmia" had charge of the eye ward.

I spent eight weeks at St. Thomas's, one week in each ward, with

the privilege of attending all operations if I chose. I could work or not as I pleased. I often did some little piece of work, such as giving medicines, which was not difficult, as the medicine of each patient stood on a bracket above the head of his bed, and was put up sufficiently diluted to be given as poured from the bottle, the usual dose being a tablespoonful. Directions were printed on the labels of the bottles.

I had a most excellent opportunity to hear clinical lectures, as the different professors took classes into the wards and the nurses could hear the lectures. I soon learned that Mrs. Wardroper was never addressed by her name; she was always spoken of as "matron." The nurses in charge were always addressed by their titles, never by name. Each nurse had a uniform for the Sabbath as well as for the weekdays, and I never saw a nurse in the hospital in any other dress besides her uniform.

As I was the first American nurse to visit the hospital, I very naturally was asked many questions regarding our methods, which were often different from theirs, as our country differs from theirs. I was often asked, "In what way do you have more freedom than we?"

I was, of course, expected to be quite different from the English, and they seemed to be surprised that my speech was so like their own. One nurse said to me, "But for two expressions I would never know you were not an Englishwoman; when you are asked to do anything, you say, 'I will do it right away,' while we say, 'I will do it directly,' and when asked if a thing is to be a certain way you say, 'I guess so,' and we say, 'I think so.'" The nurses all seemed to try to see which could show me the most kindness, and Mrs. Wardroper provided means for me to see all the hospital had to show; Miss Crossland too took special pains that nothing escaped me.

I had been in the "home" less than a week when an invitation came from Miss Nightingale for me to visit her in her London home. Shall I ever forget the excitement that invitation caused? Miss Crossland told me Miss Nightingale would ask my opinion of the different nurses, both ladies and others, and I could see that there was a little anxiety felt concerning the answers I might give. I went on the appointed day, and must say I did not feel quite at my ease as the maid took me to Miss Nightingale's room, but one look into those kind, clear-blue eyes, and the hearty grasp of the little hand quite set me at ease, and before I knew it I was talking as freely to her, who had done more than any one woman living to alleviate suffering, as I would have to a life-long friend. Miss Nightingale was lying upon the bed (I have never seen her in any other position, though I afterwards had the very great pleasure and honor of visiting her for a few days in her beautiful country home).

She was dressed in black, and on her head she wore a very becoming cap.

I was so much interested in our conversation that I had to be twice reminded of a delicious lunch which the maid brought in and placed on a little table by my side. Miss Nightingale said, "I am very glad to see you and talk of the training-school work in America." She asked me much in detail, and carefully wrote all down. When I returned to the hospital the questions were numerous: "What did Miss Nightingale say?" and "What did she want to know?" But had she asked me for criticism, which she did not, I could have found none, and as I look back to-day, I can think of none.

Not long after came the meeting of the Nightingale Training-School Committee. It was held in the large dining-room of the "home," and there I met Mr. Rothborne, Miss Florence Lees, now Mrs. Dacre Craven, at that time in charge of the District Nursing in London at a salary of twenty-five hundred dollars a year; Miss Alice Fisher, whom we know so well for her work in Blockley Hospital, Philadelphia, and many others less well known to us in America. Miss Lees in her sprightly way said to me, "The only thing I do not like about your being here is that I had nothing to do with your coming." She called upon me one day in her uniform of brown holland, in which she looked very handsome.

While I was at St. Thomas's Mrs. Rothborne gave a dinner, to which Mrs. Wardroper and I were invited and where we met Miss Lees once more, with several others connected with improvement work and several members of Parliament, among whom was the Speaker of the House of Commons, a most interesting man.

Miss Nightingale strongly advised me to try to visit King's College Hospital. She said, "It is a most interesting place; the nursing is done by the Sisters of St. John, and very thoroughly too." Acting upon her advice, I went to see the mother superior, Miss Crossland going with me. Such a sweet woman came to us in the reception-room and said, "I am the mother superior; what can I do for you?" I made known my wants, taking pains to tell her that Miss Nightingale had advised me to ask her this favor. She said she would be glad to grant the request, but they never entertained visitors who were not church people, "but," said she, "you can visit the hospital as often as you like and the sisters will be very glad to show you all about." I thanked her and went away. I could not feel disappointed, she had been so nice to me, but what was my surprise when two days later, upon visiting the hospital, Sister Amie, who was in charge of the nursing, said to me, "Are you Miss Richards from America?" I said, "I am." She said, "The mother

superior must have fallen in love with you, for she sent me word that when you came to visit the hospital I should tell you that we would be very glad to have you come and stay a month with us." I sent special thanks to the mother, and in less than a week was in the hospital as visitor. I was told that I would need a plain black dress, and that the other articles of uniform would be furnished me.

When I arrived I was taken to my room by a sweet-faced sister, and she helped me to make myself over into my new way of dressing. A cap was put upon my head and tied with a double bow beneath my chin; a brown holland apron was put on over my plain black alpaca gown. I was then taken to the ward and given over to one of the lady probationers. I soon found that the sister in charge of the ward was the only person to answer questions; no one else ever ventured to reply when the doctor asked a question, the only answer made would be, "Sister will be here directly," but when the meals came and the sister was absent and the lady probationers busy I would be asked to say "grace." I was allowed to go from ward to ward as at St. Thomas's, and as there I could work or not as I chose.

English hospitals are like our Episcopal hospitals in the matter of decorations. They had at that time elaborate mantels which were covered with Scripture texts. They took much care and work, and I often wondered who kept them in such beautiful condition. When allowed to spend two nights on night-duty I found the night nurses did it.

The wards of King's College were very much like the old wards at Bellevue, divided into two alcoves, and on each side of the ward was a nurse. At three o'clock every morning except Sunday the nurses began cleaning. One morning it would be the mantels, another the medicine-closet, and so on until all was done, then begin over again. The sisters and nurses went in and out by the back door and staircase. There were very handsome front stairs, and once I went down them. That same day Sister Amie came to me and said: "I saw you go down the front stairs to-day. I am sure you would not have done it had you known it was against the rule." I assured her that I would not, and that I was very sorry to have broken a rule. I did try to keep all rules, and only that one did I break. The sisters were kindness itself to me, and I shall always be grateful to Miss Nightingale for advising me to go there. I have very seldom heard a woman so warmly praised as the mother superior was by all the sisters and probationers, and once when she was in the ward she took pains to find me and said to me, "I am glad you are here, and I hope you are getting what you wanted to

know." I assured her that I appreciated being allowed to be there, and told her I was learning a great deal, which was very true.

Miss Nightingale had not only advised me to go to the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, but had written and made plans for my going there.

The middle of August found me in that delightful city, in the queer but very interesting old infirmary. The new one was not completed for a year after I was there. The superintendent of the Training-School, Miss Pringle, a little woman, often called by Miss Nightingale "The Little General," was half Scotch and half French, a graduate of St. Thomas's, and well she ruled her school in that old hospital. She lived in a little detached building, and I lived with her. She had for her assistant a very able Englishwoman, Miss Pyne, also a graduate of St. Thomas's. After I had been there a few days Miss Pringle said to me, "I thought you were a woman with no knowledge of hospital work and that you had come over here to pick up what you could in a few months, but I find that you know as much as I do about hospital and training-school work."

Shall I ever forget my month there? The wards were like dormitories, with partitions not reaching to the top, and every day from nine to ten in the morning and from three to four in the afternoon all male patients could smoke their fill. The wards were so filled with tobacco-smoke that one could with difficulty see across them.

Nurses in charge of wards had rooms opening off them, and nearly every such nurse kept her own dog. I had not been there very long before I found a dog following me about; an ugly-looking mongrel he was, not at all sweet tempered. No one could at first imagine why "Smike" should have adopted me, until Miss Pringle said she felt sure it was because of my resemblance to the former superintendent of nurses. Be that as it may, a faithful follower and friend did Smike prove during my stay.

The Royal Infirmary was not only very large, but it was kept very full. Every night saw "shakedown" or straw beds made up. Two children were often put into one bed, or a child put in with a man, and never a word of complaining was heard. The men would say, "I get on fine with the bairnies."

Professor Joseph Bell was at that time connected with the infirmary, and every Sunday morning (the only day when he did not have a class of students with him) he had a class of nurses go with him on rounds. Two of the number would be detailed to act as his assistants to do the work the house staff did upon other days. I always made these rounds with Miss Pringle or Miss Pyne and the nurses. I have

never in any hospital seen anything like them or anything which could take their place. Class and lectures were in other ways very like our own, and this I found in every school.

In Edinburgh there were lady probationers and nurses, but no distinction was made. All nurses were called "Nurse," and no one could tell whether the nurses received payment or paid for their training. The Fever House at the Royal Infirmary was quite separate from the rest of the hospital. The walls were tiled, and all appliances were very modern, quite different from the old infirmary. The new buildings are very fine, but the old ones were strange and rambling, covering much ground, and in some places connected by covered bridges. It was most interesting and full of cases, all of which were acute. I shall always be thankful that my visit was made in the old hospital. I was often lost in wandering about, and often failed to make myself understood by the patients or to understand them. My outings were spent in rambling over the city, which to me is very attractive.

I found the old infirmary a very good place in which to finish up my five months' experience in the British Isles. I was the first nurse to go to study methods for use in our own schools, and I was gratified to have Mrs. Wardroper tell a friend that the nursing profession had chosen a very good person to send, as I made no trouble and had made myself agreeable to the people. I prized this very highly, as Mrs. Wardroper was not given to much praise.

In looking back I can hardly see how I could have gotten along without this valuable experience, and can never be sufficiently thankful for the privilege of having had it.

I went from Edinburgh for a few days with Miss Nightingale, and received from her words of encouragement which have lasted all these years. In one of her letters to me just as I was leaving England she bade me and our profession "god-speed," saying, "Outstrip us, that we in turn may outstrip you again."

The month of October I spent in Paris, where through a friend I secured letters from an American doctor who for many years had resided there, and these letters took me into many hospitals. In some instances I was taken into clinics, and cases were described to me as to the special class the professor had at the time. Through this same doctor I was offered a position for six months in one of the Paris hospitals, but I had in mind the organizing of the Training-School of the Boston City Hospital, and so with thanks I refused and came home to begin work again January 1, 1878, and the organization of the Boston City Training-School dates from that time.